

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8842

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USUN NEW YORK 361

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGUI 1307

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, CT

SUBJ: US-CAE RELATIONS - THE MISSIONARY DIMENSION

SUMMARY: THE ENTIRE AMERICAN MISSIONARY COMMUNITY WAS INVITED TO THE IMPERIAL COURT AT BERENGO JUNE 22. BOKASSA ASSURED THE MISSIONARIES OF THE IMPORTANCE HE ATTACHED TO THEIR WORK IN THE COUNTRY, CONDEMNED COMMUNISTS AND THE SOVIET UNION, AND EXPRESSED HIS VIEW THAT US-CAE RELATIONS WERE "PRIVILEGED". END SUMMARY.

1. IN AN UNUSUAL GESTURE OF HOSPITALITY EMPEROR BOKASSA INVITED THE AMERICAN PROTESTANT MISSIONARY COMMUNITY IN BANGUI AND NEARBY TOWNS TO COME TO BERENGO FOR AN AUDIENCE AND APERITIF ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 22. MY WIFE AND I WERE ALSO ASKED TO ATTEND.

AFTER A FORMAL PRESENTATION OF EACH MISSIONARY (A TOTAL OF 30 IN ALL) TO THE EMPEROR, THE EMPRESS, PRESIDENT DACKO, VICE PRIME MINISTER MAIDOU AND A DOZEN MINISTERS OF THE IMPERIAL COURT, BOKASSA HELD A PRIVATE SESSION WITH ALL THE MISSIONARY PASTORS AND THE SENIOR CENTRAL ASRICANS IN THE CABINET ROOM AT THE PALACE.

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2. THE THEME OF BOKASSA'S PRESENTATION TO THE MISSIONARIES WAS HIS DESIRE THAT THE MISSIONARIES CONTINUE THEIR WORK IN THE CAE. HE EXPRESSED REGRET THAT THERE HAD BEEN RECENT DIFFICULTIES AND HE CASTIGATED THE REBEL BAPTIST PASTORS AS OUTLAWS AND CRIMINALS WHO WOULD NOT IN FUTURE BE ALLOWED TO DISRUPT MISSIONARY ACTIVITY. (FOR BACKGROUND SEE BANGUI 1029 AND 1103 NOTAL)

3. HE REPEATEDLY RETURNED TO THE THEME OF CLOSE US-CAE RELATIONS WHICH HE SAID WERE BOTH "PRIVILEGED AND PROTECTED". HE EXPRESSED GREAT SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT STATE OF OUR RELATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME HE CONDEMNED SOVIET IMPERIALISM IN AFRICA, ALTHOUGH ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE CAE WOULD HAVE TO WORK WITH THE RUSSIANS "TO A CERTAIN DEGREE".

4. BOKASSA ALSO APPEALED TO THE MISSIONARIES TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FULLY WITH PLANS FOR THE CORONATION, SUGGESTING THEY MIGHT WISH TO TAKE PART IN THE SOLEMN HIGH MASS AND TE DEUM PLANNED FOR THE DAY OF THE CORONATION. HE LATER MODIFIED THIS EXTRAORDINARY REQUEST, AT LEAST IN THE EYES OF THE MILITANTLY EVANGELICAL MISSIONARIES, BY SUGGESTING THEY ORGANIZE SPECIAL PRAYER SERVICES IN THEIR CHURCHES ON THAT DAY. HIS VIEW OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE IN THE U.S. BEING SOMEWHAT IMPRECISE, HE ASKED ME TO ACT AS THE MISSIONARIES' REPRESENTATIVE AND INTERPRETER WHENEVER THEY HAD PROBLEMS OR WISHED TO INFORM HIM OF THEIR PLANS FOR THE CORONATION.

5. THE THIRD AND FINAL PHASE OF THE EVENING WAS AN ELABORATE SEATED BUFFET AND APERITIF IN THE OPEN COURTYARD OF THE PALACE. FOR OVER AN HOUR I SAT BETWEEN THE EMPEROR AND PRESIDENT DACKO, WHILE BOKASSA HELD FORTH ON A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS. HIS PRINCIPAL THEME WAS FRIENDSHIP FOR THE WEST AND THE UNITED STATES, AND THE NEED FOR A CLOSE WESTERN INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICA. HE ALSO

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RETURNED TO THE THEME OF THE DANGER OF SOVIET INFLUENCE AND IMPERIALISM. BOKASSA REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED HIS ADMIRATION FOR PRESIDENT CARTER, WHOM HE SAID WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST PRESIDENTS OF MODERN TIMES. HE NOTED FAVORABLY THE PRESIDENT'S EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND HIS EFFORTS TO MOVE TOWARD A RESOLUTION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN ISSUES. HE EXPRESSED SOME RESERVE ABOUT OUR TENDENCY TO EQUATE OUR OWN CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE AND EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMPLEX RACIAL SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

6. BOKASSA ALSO EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT OUR DECISION TO RESTORE RELATIONS

WITH THE CONGO. THE NEW REGIME OF COL. YHOMBI, HE SAID, WAS TRYING TO GET OUT FROM UNDER SOVIET INFLUENCE. YHOMBI'S FATHER HAD BEEN A CLOSE FRIEND OF THE CAE'S FIRST PRESIDENT BOGANDA, AND YHOMBI HAD ALREADY MOVED TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE CAE BY NOMINATING AN AMBASSADOR TO BANGUI, AFTER MANY YEARS WHEN THE RELATIONS WERE FROZEN AT CHARGE D'AFFAIRES LEVEL. BOKASSA SAID HE WOULD SOON RECIPROCATE.

7. THE BURDEN OF THIS DIALOGUE WAS CARRIED BY BOKASSA, ALTHOUGH I WAS OCCASIONALLY PERMITTED TO GET IN A BRIEF COMMENT OR CLARIFICATION. I WAS ABLE TO SKETCH OUT VERY BRIEFLY FOR BOKASSA

THE FIVE-POWER EFFORTS ON NAMIBIA AND TO GIVE A BIT OF PERSPECTIVE TO OUR POLICY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. I ALSO TOLD HIM SOMETHING OF OUR CURRENT PROGRAMS IN THE CAE. HE WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED TO HEAR OF OUR INCREASING PEACE CORPS PRESENCE AND AT THE APPROVAL IN WASHINGTON OF THE OUHAM PROJECT. HE HINTED HE WOULD ORGANIZE A SIMILAR RECEPTION AT BERENGO FOR THE VOLUNTEERS.

8. BOKASSA ALSO COMMENTED ON THE CORONATION AND SAID HE WAS INFORMING ME OFFICIALLY THAT THE DATE HAD BEEN SET FOR DECEMBER 4. HE WOULD BE SENDING INVITATIONS TO ALL FRIENDLY HEADS OF STATE INCLUDING PRESIDENT CARTER. IF THEY COULD NOT COME IN PERSON HE HOPED THAT THEY WOULD DESIGNATE SOMEONE TO REPRESENT THEM.

9. COMMENT: BOKASSA THROUGHOUT THIS RATHER EXTRAORDINARY EVENING
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WAS RELAXED, AFFABLE AND CHARMING. THE MISSIONARIES WERE POSITIVELY ECSTATIC AT THE ASSURANCES OF SUPPORT THEY RECEIVED. IT APPEARS THAT BOKASSA HAS ONCE AGAIN DECIDED TO LAUNCH AN OFFENSIVE OF CHARM IN OUR DIRECTION, WHICH SHOULD FACILITATE, IN THE SHORT RUN AT LEAST, THE TASK OF IMPLEMENTING OUR VARIOUS PROGRAMS IN THE COUNTRY.
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